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ABSTRACT

A follow-up study of high school students who had taken a law-related education (LRE) course as junior high students showed that the LRE course continued to have a positive effect on the students' behavior. In the original study, ninth-graders taking LRE courses were compared with ninth-graders enrolled in conventional civics courses. At the beginning and end of the semester, both LRE and control students completed questionnaires that measured 14 behavior-related dimensions and frequency of ten categories of delinquent acts. Compared with control subjects, LRE students showed a reduction in frequency of six categories of delinquent behavior. LRE students also showed favorable effects relative to controls on ten behavior-related dimensions. Fifty-five (46 percent) of the original 118 subjects participated in the 16-month followup research at the end of their first year in high school. The followup questionnaire contained the same pre/post delinquency and behavior measures used in the original study. Sixteen months after completing the course, the former LRE students appeared better off on eight counts than those assigned to conventional ninth grade civics courses and worse off on none. (RM)

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EFFECTS OF LAW-RELATED EDUCATION

SUSTAINED AT SIXTEEN-MONTH FOLLOWUP

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1984

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Grant Johnson, Center for Action Research, Inc.

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In fall 1982, Bill Reed Junior High School (Loveland, Colorado) began offering law-related education (LRE) in place of conventional civics classes to randomly selected ninth-grade students. There were three sections of LRE and three sections of civics; the sole determinant of which ninth-graders received LRE and which did not was randomly generated computer assignment. In an evaluation of the effects of LRE, students assigned to civics served as control subjects. At the start and end of the semester, both LRE students and controls completed questionnaires that included measures of delinquency and factors related to behavior. During the semester, the evaluators performed classroom observations in all six sections.

In June 1984, LRE and control students who had participated in the original study and who were now attending one of the two high schools in the same district completed questionnaires similar to those administered in 1982.

Immediate Effects of LRE: Findings in February 1983

The student questionnaires contained eight measures pertaining to the particular LRE and civics classes in the study (administered only at the end of the semester) and twenty-four "before and after" measures (administered at the start and end of the semester). The latter covered fourteen dimensions known to be associated with law-abiding or delinquent behavior and the

frequency of commission of ten categories of delinquent acts. Matched pre- and posttests were obtained from 118 students.

For the class-specific measures that appeared only on the posttest, means and standard deviations were computed for the LRE and control classes, respectively. T-tests of differences in means on each measure were used to identify instances where the LRE and control classes differed. Out of eight possible outcomes, there were five statistically significant differences (.05, one-tailed test), all favoring the LRE classes. There were also three nonsignificant trends (p= .06 to .20), two favoring the LRE classes and one favoring the control classes.[1]

To analyze the measures that appeared on both the pretest and the posttest, the evaluators used a multiple regression procedure for identifying program effects.[2] Out of twenty-four possible outcomes in this group of measures, there were nine statistically significant differences and seven nonsignificant trends. All sixteen differences favored the LRE classes.

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1. The class-specific measures covered such dimensions as students' perceptions of the fairness of the teacher's grading practices, clockwatching by students in the class, and attention received from the teacher and other students.

2. Individual offense histories and before-treatment ratings on other dimensions partially determine the frequencies and ratings exhibited by the same individuals at any later point in time. Although the experimental and control subjects at Bill Reed Junior High School were well matched on these variables at the start of the study, the evaluators took another step to avoid attributing to LRE any differences between the groups at the end of the semester that were due to differences among students initially. In the multiple regression analysis of each posttest score or behavior frequency (the dependent variables), the corresponding pretest score or frequency and age were specified as the first two independent variables to enter the analysis. Only after these had accounted for their shares of variance in the posttest measures did the LRE/control variable enter the equation. As a consequence, the analysis showed the <u>additional</u> effect of LRE --over and above the effects of pretest score and age.

Expressed in B-weights and in standard deviation units,[3] these effects of LRE (along with the other possible outcomes) are displayed in the columns headed "2/83" in Table 1.

The classroom observations assessed the degree to which six features recommended for effective LRE (based on a study of LRE in the preceding year and other educational research) were present. The recommendations were for (1) adequate preparation and use of outside resource persons, (2) balanced presentation of cases and other illustrative materials, (3) use of teaching strategies that foster true interaction and joint work among students, (4) provision of sufficient quality and quantity of instruction, (5) availability and use by teachers of professional peer support, and (6) active involvement of building administrators. The observations indicated that all six recommended features were present to a high degree in the LRE classes at this junior high school. Moreover, the general quality of instruction (e.g., use of mastery learning methods) was rated high in the civics control classes as well.

Both favorable impact on students and the process for achieving that impact (embodied in the six recommended features) surpassed the levels found by the same team of evaluators at other sites in fall 1982.

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3. Information contained in the table permits estimation of the magnitude of LRE students' advantage over control subjects. The B-weights shown for delinquent behavior represent average per-student changes in frequency attributed to LRE. A negative B-weight indicates the average number of delinquent acts of a particular type that were avoided per student as a consequence of LRE. The remaining measures do not translate into concrete acts, but their approximation to normally distributed variables allows an alternate estimate of magnitude. With use of a table showing areas under a normal curve, effects expressed in standard deviation units can be converted to estimated percentile scores to indicate the standing relative to untreated subjects of an average treated subject (in this instance, an LRE student). For example, an effect size of .25 standard deviation units translates into the 60th percentile and an effect size of .45 standard deviation units would put LRE students in the 67th percentile. If preceded by minus signs, these two effect sizes would translate to the 40th and 33rd percentiles, respectively.

Longer Term Effects of LRE: Findings in June 1984

Fifty-five of the original 118 subjects (46 percent) participated in the sixteen-month followup research at the end of their first year in high school. Random assignment had resulted in a strong match between experimental and control groups at the start of the study. To check on the original comparability of the diminished groups available for followup, t-tests were performed on their pretest measures (with students no longer in the study excluded). The experimental and control subjects remaining in the study differed significantly on only one pretest measure ("Agreement with rationalizations for deviance"). In short, attrition did not appear to compromise seriously the initial match between students assigned to LRE and those assigned to civics.

The followup questionnaire contained the twenty-four longitudinal (pre/post) measures used in the original study: fourteen behavior-related dimensions and frequency of commission of ten categories of delinquent acts. The eight class-specific measures used earlier were deemed inappropriate for sixteen-month followup and were not included. The multiple regression procedure used earlier was repeated for the new data, this time treating the June 1984 behavior frequencies and scale scores as dependent variables.

Although the diminished number of respondents resulted in fewer instances of statistical significance, the effect sizes for eight of the original sixteen favorable outcomes equalled or surpassed those obtained at the end of the semester in which LRE was taught.

Compared with control subjects, LRE students in February 1983 had shown a reduction in frequency of commission of six categories of delinquent behavior. Sixteen months later, the reductions were still evident for four of

the six forms of delinquency (and for three of the four, the LRE students' advantage over the controls had increased). In February 1983, LRE students also had shown favorable effects relative to controls on ten behavior-related dimensions. For four of the ten dimensions, the effects at sixteen-month followup equalled or exceeded those obtained earlier. Again expressed in B-weights and in standard deviation units, these effects appear in the columns headed "6/84" in Table 1. There was no behavior or other measured outcome for which control subjects displayed an advantage over students who had received LRE. Sixteen months after completing the course, the former LRE students appeared better off on eight counts than those assigned to conventional ninth-grade civics and worse off on none.

TABLE 1

EFFECTS OF LAW-RELATED EDUCATION ON STUDENTS AT BILL REED JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AT THE END OF THE FALL 1982 SEMESTER AND AT 16-MONTH FOLLOWUP (JUNE 1984)

Outcome Measured	Desired Effect	Effect of LRE: B-Weight		Effect of LRE: Std. Dev. Units	
		Immediate (2/83)	16-Month Followup (6/84)	Immediate (2/83)	16-Month Followup (6/84)
COMMITMENT					
Importance of doing well in school and being regarded as a good student	+	+.1*	+.2*	.25	.44
ATTACHMENT					
Attachment to teachers	+	+.2	0	.19	0
Isolation from school	-	-.3*	-.3	-.37	-.43
INVOLVEMENT					
Amount of time spent doing homework	+	+.3*	+.8*	.22	.44
BELIEF					
Favorable attitudes toward police	+	+.2*	0	.26	0
Perceived fairness of the judicial system	+	+.4*	+.4	.44	.48
Unfavorable attitudes toward deviance	+	0	0	0	0
Favorable attitudes toward personal violence	-	-.1	0	-.14	0
Agreement with rationalizations for deviance	-	0	0	0	0
LABELING					
Negative by teachers	-	-.4*	0	-.33	0
Negative by parents	-	0	0	0	0
Negative by friends	-	-.2	0	-.16	0
PEER RELATIONSHIPS					
Delinquent peer influence	-	-.2*	0	-.28	0
Exposure to delinquent peers	-	0	0	0	0
DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR					
School rule infractions	-	-.7	-1.7	-.15	-.28
Violence against other students	-	-.4	-.5	-.17	-.26
Minor fraud (avoid payment for food, shows)	-	0	0	0	0
Vandalism (damage or destroy others' property)	-	0	0	0	0
Go with group to fight or break the law	-	0	0	0	0
Other status offenses (lie about age, runaway)	-	-.3	-.7	-.18	-.32
Drinking alcohol	-	-1.1*	-1.1	-.30	-.28
Smoking marijuana	-	-.4	0	-.17	0
Index offenses (5 UCR offenses combined)	-	0	0	0	0
Minor theft (steal less than $50, joyride)	-	-.6*	0	.29	0

*Significant at .05 or better (1-tailed test)
(All other figures are significant at .20 or better)